

Contemplation
of
Feeling

Sayalay Susilā

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*A letter of appreciation
from a yogi*



I have known Sayalay Susīlā since 2008, when she came to Singapore to give Dhamma talks and teach Abhidhamma, and I have been her personal attendant since that day.

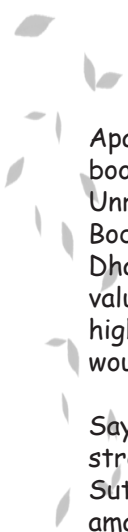
For eight years, I had been practicing Samādhi-Vipassāna under the guidance of another teacher from a lineage with which Sayalay Susīlā is familiar. In late 2014, I practiced under Sayalay Susīlā's guidance during the inaugural retreat at Appamādaviharī Meditation Center. I found her to be very wise, encouraging, open minded, and non-judgmental during my practice interview sessions. She gave me a clear direction when I had been having thoughts of giving up progress in my earlier




meditation practice.

More importantly, Sayalay Susilā advised me to listen to her talks online. The perception of my own practice changed after listening to just a few of her talks—they made me realize my inadequate knowledge of the Dhamma, and taught me the meditation skills required to achieve a higher level of breakthrough in my Vipassāna practice.

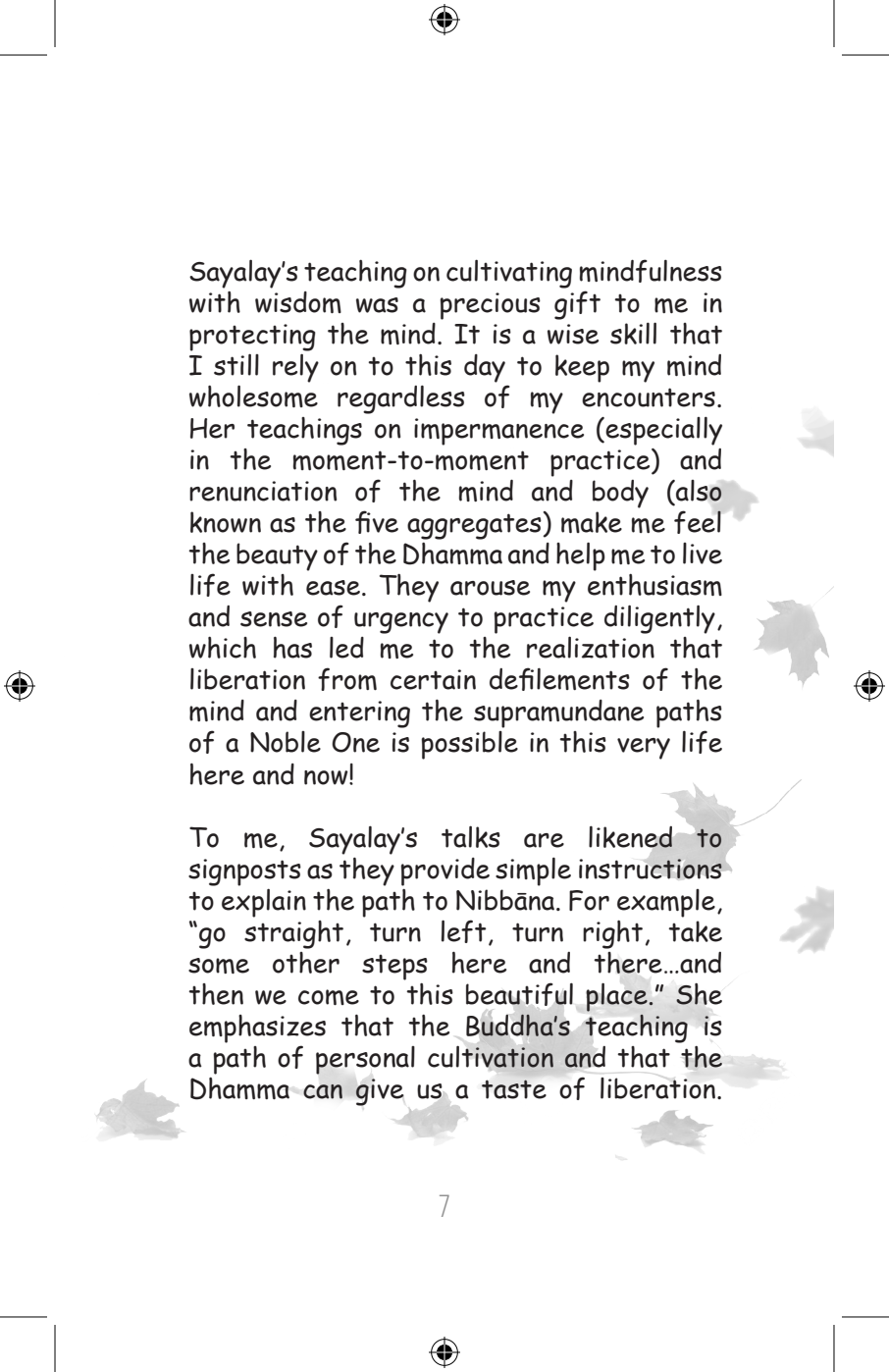
After leaving that retreat, I listened ardently to all Sayalay's online talks—both the English as well as the mandarin versions—while sitting in a meditation posture for approximately three to four hours daily for six months before joining her next retreat in July 2015. Some of her talks that had significant impact on my practice were her teachings on the gratifications and dangers of the five aggregates, inner exploration, the simile of the viper, investigations of the Dhamma on mind and body, contemplation of feeling in the feeling and contemplation of the mind states, mindfulness and clear comprehension—namely the four foundations of mindfulness.



Apart from the online talks, Sayalay Susīlā's books were also very helpful, particularly *Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind and Body*, *The Path to Happiness*, and the *Dhamma Essence* guide. They provided valuable insights to my meditation practice, highlighting key ideas for liberation that would be beneficial to any insight meditator.



Sayalay Susīlā teaches the Suttas with strong clarity and precision. She makes Sutta studies simple yet profound—it is amazing how she can put together some very simple words that point to deep truths and to our own liberation. Her teachings on the four foundations of mindfulness, especially contemplation of feeling and the mind states, are highly insightful and liberating. These contemplations were key for me to realize sharper insight knowledge, and aptly complemented what I lacked in the insight practice I had been doing for several years. It was through this that I knew I had found a teacher who could nurture my wisdom to achieve a breakthrough in my insight meditation.



Sayalay's teaching on cultivating mindfulness with wisdom was a precious gift to me in protecting the mind. It is a wise skill that I still rely on to this day to keep my mind wholesome regardless of my encounters. Her teachings on impermanence (especially in the moment-to-moment practice) and renunciation of the mind and body (also known as the five aggregates) make me feel the beauty of the Dhamma and help me to live life with ease. They arouse my enthusiasm and sense of urgency to practice diligently, which has led me to the realization that liberation from certain defilements of the mind and entering the supramundane paths of a Noble One is possible in this very life here and now!

To me, Sayalay's talks are likened to signposts as they provide simple instructions to explain the path to Nibbāna. For example, "go straight, turn left, turn right, take some other steps here and there...and then we come to this beautiful place." She emphasizes that the Buddha's teaching is a path of personal cultivation and that the Dhamma can give us a taste of liberation.

From my experience, we should accept this wisdom with an open mind as the Dhamma transcends languages, cultures, and beings.

I am deeply grateful and thankful to Sayalay Susīlā for guiding me in my spiritual practice to the next level of higher wisdom. Without her, I wouldn't have realized the beauty of the Buddha's teaching, which I have thoroughly benefitted from.

Though all his life a fool associates with a wise man, he no more comprehends the Truth than a spoon tastes the flavor of the soup. Dhp (64)

Though only for a moment a discerning person associates with a wise man, quickly he comprehends the Truth, just as the tongue tastes the flavor of the soup. Dhp (65)

With deep appreciation and gratitude,

Medhāvi, Singapore 2016.





1
Introduction



Contemplation of Feeling

Feeling is one of the mental factors that must arise with all consciousness. Since the stream of consciousness is flowing from the very moment of birth until death, this means that feeling is with us all the time. We do not have to look for it somewhere else, but learn to simply be aware of it. Contemplation of feeling therefore becomes one of the foundations for us to develop mindfulness and wisdom.

In the sutta “The Foundations of Mindfulness” (MN 10), the Buddha taught:

**“This is the only way, bhikkhus,
for the purification of beings, for**

the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for reaching the noble path, for the realization of nibbāna, namely, the four foundations of mindfulness.


“What are the four?

“Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu lives contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending (it) and mindful (of it), having overcome, in this world, covetousness and grief; he lives contemplating feelings in feelings, ardent, clearly comprehending (them) and mindful (of them), having overcome, in this world, covetousness and grief; he lives contemplating mind in mind, ardent, clearly comprehending (it) and mindful (of it), having overcome in this world covetousness and grief;




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he lives contemplating mental objects in mental objects, ardent, clearly comprehending (them) and mindful (of them), having overcome, in this world, covetousness and grief.”



Contemplation of feeling is one of the practices in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, and is also a very important practice on the path to cessation of suffering. This is because, in the cycle of dependent origination, feeling conditions craving—the origin of all suffering, and the root of all existence.



Dependent origination explains:

- dependent on ignorance arise kammic formations;
- dependent on kammic formations arises consciousness;
- dependent on consciousness arise mind and matter;

- dependent on mind and matter arise the six sense-bases;
- dependent on the six sense-bases arises contact;
- dependent on contact arises feeling;
- **dependent on feeling arises craving;**
- dependent on craving arises clinging;
- dependent on clinging arises becoming;
- dependent on becoming arises birth;
- dependent on birth arise aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Thus arises this entire mass of suffering.

“...dependent on feeling arises craving, dependent on craving arises clinging, dependent on clinging arises becoming...”

Craving leads to clinging which leads to further becoming. Here, “becoming” means kammic becoming. And kammās rooted in ignorance and craving pave the way to



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the continuous cycle of life and rebirth. Therefore, regardless of what feeling arises, the Buddha taught us to clearly comprehend it with mindfulness and contemplate its origination and cessation. When the feeling ceases, the craving caused by the feeling will cease and allow our minds to be momentarily in a state of calm and peace.

Sakka, ruler of gods, was interested in how to bring craving to complete destruction. He thus went to the Blessed One, and asked:

“Venerable sir, how in brief is a bhikkhu liberated by the destruction of craving, one who has reached the ultimate end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy life, the ultimate goal, one who is foremost among gods and humans?” The Blessed One answered in connection with feelings in brief: **“Here, ruler of gods, a bhikkhu has heard that nothing is worth adhering to. When a bhikkhu**



has heard that nothing is worth adhering to, he directly knows everything; having directly known everything, he fully understands everything; having fully understood everything, whatever feeling he feels, whether pleasant or unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant, he abides contemplating impermanence in those feelings, contemplating fading away, contemplating cessation, contemplating relinquishment. Contemplating thus, he does not cling to anything in the world. When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he personally attains nibbāna.” (MN 37)



2

*Three types
of feeling*



As mentioned in the *Vedanā-Samīyutta*, the Buddha likens feeling to the wind coming from different directions. Wind can sometimes be cold or hot; it can be damp or dusty. Similarly, the Buddha described three major kinds of feeling—pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral (neither pleasant nor unpleasant). Further, the Buddha also categorized these three kinds of feeling into two types—worldly (*sāmisa*) and non-worldly (*nirāmisa*).

Worldly (*sāmisa*) Feeling

Worldly pleasant feelings refer to feelings originating from sensual pleasures. Such pleasant feelings can cause the arising of

defilements. Examples include: physical contact with the opposite sex, watching violent movies, enjoying food excessively, taking delight in gains, fantasizing, and so forth.

Worldly unpleasant feelings include: demotion, discord with loved ones, failed examinations, lost jobs, betrayals, inability to get the sensual object one desires, bankruptcy, sickness, deaths in the family, physical pain during meditation, etc.

Worldly neutral feelings are feelings associated with wandering thoughts or doubts.

Non-worldly (nirāmisa) Feeling


Non-worldly feelings are also of three kinds—pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral.

Non-worldly pleasant feelings are spiritual




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feelings; they are not tainted with sensual desires. Non-worldly pleasant feelings arise when a person selflessly offers service to the community; supports monastics; reads suttas; practices sublime abiding meditation of loving-kindness, compassion, and appreciative joy; recollects the virtues of the Buddha; and attains access concentration and the concentration of the first, second, and third jhānas.



Non-worldly unpleasant feelings include: lamenting about one's stagnation in the spiritual practice, not finding a competent teacher, getting lost in the practice, longing for supreme liberation and the grief that arises with that longing as a condition, or contemplating suffering in life.



Non-worldly neutral feelings arise when a person attains Knowledge of Equanimity about Formations (*sankhārupekkhā ñāna*) through insight meditation or fourth jhāna

through concentration meditation.





3

*The Buddha's teaching
on contemplation of feeling
as a foundation
of mindfulness*



Contemplation of Feeling

The text from the “Foundations of Mindfulness” reads:

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu dwell contemplating feelings in feelings?”


“Herein, bhikkhus, when experiencing a pleasant feeling, the bhikkhu knows, ‘I experience a pleasant feeling’; when experiencing an unpleasant feeling, he knows, ‘I experience an unpleasant feeling’; when experiencing a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling.’”

“When experiencing a pleasant worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a pleasant worldly feeling’; when experiencing a pleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a pleasant non-worldly feeling’; when experiencing an unpleasant worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience an unpleasant worldly feeling’; when experiencing an unpleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience an unpleasant non-worldly feeling’; when experiencing a neither pleasant nor unpleasant worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a neither pleasant nor unpleasant worldly feeling’; when experiencing a neither pleasant nor unpleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a neither pleasant nor unpleasant non-worldly feeling.’




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“Thus he dwells contemplating the feelings in the feelings internally, or he dwells contemplating the feelings in the feelings externally, or he dwells contemplating the feelings in the feelings both internally and externally.



“He dwells contemplating the origination factors in the feelings, or he dwells contemplating the cessation factors in the feelings, or he dwells contemplating both the origination and cessation factors in the feelings.



“Or his mindfulness is established as ‘there is feeling.’ And that mindfulness is established to the extent necessary for further knowledge and mindfulness.

“Not depending on (or attached to) anything by way of craving and wrong

view, he dwells. Nor does he cling to anything in the world.”





4


*Contemplation of feeling
by way
of mindfulness*




Contemplation of Feeling

“Herein, bhikkhus, when experiencing a pleasant feeling, the bhikkhu knows, ‘I experience a pleasant feeling.’”


When pleasant feeling arises due to contact with the six sense bases, a practitioner is immediately aware of it with mindfulness thus: **‘I experience a pleasant feeling.’** On the other hand, a person with a muddled mind, without mindfulness and clear comprehension, becomes overjoyed when he feels pleasant feeling. His mind hustles like a monkey, grasps the pleasant feeling as “myself” with wrong view, and allows craving to enslave his mind.



If we react toward pleasant feeling without mindfulness and clear comprehension again and again, it becomes a habit. As we know, a habit is difficult to change. However, with mindfulness and clear comprehension—that is, mindfully and clearly comprehending pleasant feeling as simply pleasant feeling—we disentangle our old habit. In this way, we do not allow pleasant feeling to be the condition for craving, grasping, and wrong view of self.



“...when experiencing an unpleasant feeling, the bhikkhu knows, ‘I experience an unpleasant feeling’...”





Similarly, when experiencing an unpleasant feeling, we should be aware of unpleasant feeling as simply unpleasant feeling. Then unpleasant feeling will not become a condition for agitation and hatred.

Let me share an example of this.



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Many years ago, when a heat wave struck London, I was at the London airport. Before the plane took off, the cabin in the plane was really hot and the passengers in the cabin, including myself, were fretfully fanning off the heat. My mind became agitated. Suddenly, I felt quite ashamed of my reaction. Being a practitioner, when challenged by a heat wave, I reacted as unmindfully as a non-practitioner! Stirred by shame, I quickly called up mindfulness. Mindfully and objectively, I comprehended heat as simply heat. In an instant, I felt relief from the oppression of heat. My mind became calm and undisturbed.



Contemplating Wordly and Non-Worldly Feeling

“When experiencing a pleasant worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a pleasant worldly feeling’; when experiencing a pleasant non-worldly feeling, he

knows, ‘I experience a pleasant non-worldly feeling’; when experiencing an unpleasant worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience an unpleasant worldly feeling’; when experiencing an unpleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience an unpleasant non-worldly feeling’; when experiencing a neither pleasant nor unpleasant worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a neither pleasant nor unpleasant worldly feeling’; when experiencing a neither pleasant nor unpleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a neither pleasant nor unpleasant non-worldly feeling.’”


The Buddha divided the three types of feeling into worldly or non-worldly. Let’s look at each type in detail:

“...when experiencing a pleasant




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worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I
experience a pleasant worldly
feeling’...”



Pleasant worldly feeling refers to pleasant feelings resulting from objects of sensual pleasure. When does pleasant worldly feeling arise? When the six pleasant sensual objects come into contact with the six sense bases. This happens in our daily life. For example, pleasant worldly feeling arises when the eyes come into contact with a loved one; the ears come into contact with the sweet sound of compliments; the nose smells a lovely fragrance; the tongue tastes delicious food; the body touches a fine material or the opposite sex; and the mind fantasizes or recollects a past sweet memory. At this time, the one with mindfulness knows, “I am experiencing a pleasant worldly feeling.”



“...when experiencing an unpleasant
worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I

experience an unpleasant worldly feeling'..."

In this case, an example may be useful: Suppose a man is trying different ways to win over a woman he loves. When his wish does not come true, he experiences unpleasant worldly feeling. He should immediately comprehend that "I am experiencing an unpleasant worldly feeling." He needs to understand that it is merely the arising of unpleasant feeling, and that unpleasant feeling is neither permanent, nor "mine", "I", "myself." Only then will the unpleasant feeling not turn to sorrow, grief, lamentation, and despair.


Unfortunately, when unpleasant feeling arises, because of its great impact—unbearable to the body and mind—most people immediately identify with and hold on to it. They sorrow, grieve, and lament; they weep, beat their chest, and become




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distraught. They are completely carried away by that unpleasant feeling.


Finding no way to escape from this grief and despair, one may torture oneself or even commit suicide, as one of my extended family members did. Unable to cope with the despair of not getting the woman he desired, he left the gas stove on and killed himself using carbon monoxide.




Another person may think, “Since I can’t get her, I won’t let others get her either!” He then may kill both the woman and himself, leading to irreparable tragedy.




To get rid of such unpleasant feeling and despair, some may seek delight or indulge themselves in sensual pleasure—intoxicating themselves with drugs, alcohol, or sex. For what reason? Because uninstructed worldlings do not know of any escape from unpleasant feeling other than sensual



pleasure. When they seek delight in sensual pleasure, the underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feeling lies behind this.



I once heard a story about a man. Right after he got married, both his parents passed away from cancer, followed by his brother's death due to an accident. This man fell into great despair, unable to cope with such sudden tragedy. To forget his pain, he began to intoxicate himself with alcohol and women until his wife asked for a divorce. So if a person does not know how to contemplate unpleasant feeling, he may suffer from serious consequences.




“...when experiencing a neither pleasant nor unpleasant worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a neither pleasant nor unpleasant worldly feeling’...”

In our meditation, instead of paying




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attention to the object of observation, sometimes the mind is occupied with wandering thoughts or is in a state of perplexity. At this time, we may experience neither pleasant nor unpleasant worldly feeling. Wandering thoughts and doubt are unwholesome worldly mental formations. Excessive indulgence in them may eventually give rise to agitation.



Non-worldly feelings arise from spiritual objects:



“...when experiencing a pleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a pleasant non-worldly feeling’...”

A pleasant non-worldly feeling refers to a pleasant feeling that arises from a spiritual object. Examples of pleasant non-worldly feelings are the joy that arises from listening to sutta readings or inspiring Dhamma



talks, from contemplating the virtues of the Buddha, radiating loving-kindness, and so forth.

Another example is the joy that a person experiences when he is in access concentration or jhana concentration. As jhāna is unworldly, it is a joy that arises when the five sense bases depart from the enjoyment of five sense objects. It is a pure spiritual joy and satisfaction. This kind of joy is far superior to the joy associated with sensuality, a fact that has been reported by a few of my students.

Spiritual joy is also important in the progress of practice. This is because it leads to happiness, and happiness leads to concentration. Also, when there is joy, the mind is content. When the mind is content, it settles easily on the practice, rather than lingering on sensual objects.







Contemplation of Feeling


When we experience such a pleasant non-worldly feeling, we should understand that it is merely a pleasant non-worldly feeling, and not regard this pleasant feeling as “mine” or become attached to it.

“...when experiencing an unpleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience an unpleasant non-worldly feeling’...”





Similarly, when we experience an unpleasant non-worldly feeling, mindfully we contemplate, “I experience an unpleasant non-worldly feeling.” Such unpleasant non-worldly feeling may arise when we long for spiritual progress. 

There once was a senior monk called Mahasiva Thera. He was proficient in all the teachings of the Buddha and had guided many students to arahantship. However, he himself was still a worldling. Reminded by



his noble disciple, he decided to put aside his teaching duties and practice intensively in the forest. He was confident that he would become an arahant in a few days. However, days and months passed by and he still had not attained any stage of sainthood. He was ashamed to face his students, so he continued to practice diligently. One year... seven years... ten years... twenty years... thirty years passed, and he still had not attained what he aspired to. Reflecting on his plight, he was overwhelmed with despair and broke into tears under a tree. This is a kind of unpleasant non-worldly feeling.




During the practice of concentration, if our practice is stagnant despite our strenuous effort, but we happen to hear of others' swift progress of seeing the brilliant light and entering into jhāna, we may feel disheartened. At this time, we should contemplate unpleasant feeling as purely an unpleasant feeling, not "my" unpleasant




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feeling; otherwise, we might end up like Mahasiva Thera, crying in despair.

While Mahasiva Thera was crying under a tree, a deva residing in the tree was moved and wanted to help him. He turned himself into a man and started crying under another tree. The Thera was astonished, finding the man's behavior strange. He approached him and asked, "Why are you crying?"



"I thought I could become an arahant by crying," the deva answered. 

When he heard this answer, Mahasiva Thera was put to shame. He aroused relentless effort and exerted more energy into his practice and soon attained the state of arahantship.

It took Mahasiva Thera thirty years to attain his aspiration. During this long, long time, he suffered a lot of unpleasant non-worldly

feelings.

“...when experiencing a neither pleasant nor unpleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, ‘I experience a neither pleasant nor unpleasant non-worldly feeling’...”

When a practitioner enters the fourth jhāna, he dwells in non-worldly feeling that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. The happiness experienced in the first, second, and third jhānas is a pleasant non-worldly feeling.

When an insight practitioner cultivates different stages of insight knowledge and finally attains the Knowledge of Equanimity towards Formations, he also dwells in neither pleasant nor unpleasant non-worldly feeling. At this time, he should clearly comprehend the feeling as it is.



Contemplation of Feeling

“Thus he dwells contemplating the feelings in the feelings internally, or he dwells contemplating the feelings in the feelings externally, or he dwells contemplating the feelings in the feelings both internally and externally.”

Here, the Buddha mentioned “contemplating feelings in the feelings.” This is to show that feeling is not “self.” We should not see feelings as “self.” Since there is no “self” to be found, how can we contemplate feeling as “self”? If we see feelings as “self,” identity view comes about. To disentangle the net of this identity view, we should see feelings in the feelings or feelings as mental states (not as a self)—as they really are.



Not only do we need to contemplate our own feeling, but others’ pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings. This





is to make this insight knowledge more comprehensive.

How should we contemplate others' feelings? Simply by associating with and watching others' facial expressions, we can guess what type of feeling they are experiencing in the moment. Or if it is in an intensive retreat setting, we may do so through inference: Through our own actual experience, we come to understand that others would experience the same feelings—pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant.



Then, we alternately contemplate feelings internally and externally until wisdom is strengthened. Through contemplating feeling internally, we gradually come to understand that there is only feeling, and no “self.” Through contemplating feeling externally, we come to understand that there is only feeling, and no “other being.”



Contemplation of Feeling

As such, we eliminate the attachment to self and others, and gradually realize a world composed of mere phenomena. As is said in “The Path to Purification”: *“Mere phenomena rolling on, no one is found.”*





5



*Contemplating the
origination and cessation
of feeling*





Contemplation of Feeling

“He dwells contemplating the origination factors in the feelings, or he dwells contemplating the cessation factors in the feelings, or he dwells contemplating both the origination and cessation factors in the feelings.”



Having become aware of the arising of different feelings, we further investigate the factors that cause their arising. Origination factors (*samudaya*) refer to the origination and the causes of origination of feeling. Cessation factors (*vaya*) refer to the cessation and the causes of cessation of feeling. In general, this practice guides us to contemplate the feeling’s (1) origination, (2) cessation,

- (3) both origination and cessation, and
(4) causes of the feeling's origination and cessation.

Contemplation Origination and Cessation

When one of the six sense bases comes into contact with one of the six sense objects, one of the feelings will arise. We should contemplate the origination of the feeling. In other words, mindfulness continuously knows the arising of the feeling as “arising, arising, arising.”


Such contemplation—the origination factors in the feelings—helps to eliminate the notion of non-existence because when we keep seeing the arising of feeling, our minds will not entertain the notion of non-existence. When mindfulness is thus sustained on feeling, the feeling gradually dissolves.




Contemplation of Feeling

When the feeling dissolves, we are aware of its cessation as “ceasing, ceasing, ceasing.” We contemplate feeling’s cessation, and such contemplation eliminates the notion of existence, because when we keep seeing the cessation of feeling, our minds will not entertain the notion of existence.

Investigating the Causes




After contemplating the origination and cessation of feelings, we should investigate the causes of the origination of feelings. There are two causes of the origination of feelings: proximate cause and root cause.




The Proximate Cause

The proximate cause of pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant feelings is contact. Every contact leads to one of these three types of feelings. For example, when




the eyes come into contact with a pleasant form, pleasant feeling arises; when the eyes come into contact with an unpleasant form, unpleasant feeling arises; when the eyes come into contact with a neither pleasant nor unpleasant form, neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling arises.

This is the same with the other five sense bases of ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind.



When an unpleasant feeling arises due to contact—for example unpleasant ear contact with undesired sound—we should contemplate its conditioned origination as such: “unpleasant ear contact is the cause, unpleasant feeling is the effect.” Without discerning cause and effect in this way, our habitual reaction will grasp the unpleasant feeling as myself and suffer accordingly. This is what happened to me more than 15 years ago when I was still new in my practice.



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At that time, I was reporting something to my teacher while he was waiting for the gong to strike for almsround. As I had taken a longer time than before, the almsround was delayed. My teacher's attendant got very angry with me and shouted very loudly and harshly at me in front of hundreds of monks. Due to this unpleasant ear contact, and also my unwise attention—assuming a "self" or ego that was hurt—a strong unpleasant feeling arose in me. Unable to disassociate that unpleasant feeling from "myself," I felt offended and mentally tormented.

In the middle of this, suddenly Venerable Sariputta's teaching in regards to the cause and effect of contact and feeling struck me. "This unpleasant feeling born of ear-contact is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact." (MN 28)

I quickly contemplated unpleasant feeling as impermanent, not a self; ear contact as impermanent, not a self; ear contact as the cause, unpleasant feeling as the effect. As I kept on contemplating in this way, I was amazed! My unpleasant feeling and agitation vanished in no time, leaving

the mind calm and relaxed!

Thus we see feeling arises due to cause and condition. It is conditioned by contact. When contact ceases, feeling comes to an end. As contact is also conditionally originated and subject to change, how can the feeling be permanent?

The Root Cause

The root causes of feeling are ignorance, craving, clinging, formations, and kamma. In the past, due to ignorance—not knowing that suffering is inherent in life—we craved and clung to life. Craving for life is a strong factor that drives us to perform various actions (formations) with the intention to get a new life again in the future. Such formation leaves behind kammic force (kamma) in our mental continuum. When that kamma meets with favorable conditions, new life comes to be. With



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birth as a condition, the sixfold sense bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) come to be; with the sixfold sense bases as a condition, the sixfold contacts come to be. With the contacts as a condition, feeling comes to be. This is how we contemplate the root cause of feeling.

“When this exists, that comes to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.”

When ignorance, craving, and clinging are permanently eliminated by arahant path consciousness, formations and kamma will cease. With the complete cessation of the root causes of ignorance, craving, clinging, formations, and kamma, mind and matter cease to arise. With final cessation of mind and matter, the sixfold sense bases cease; with the cessation of the sixfold sense bases, feelings do not come to be. This is the contemplation on the cessation of root cause in feeling. Before final cessation, due



to the existing causes—ignorance, craving, clinging, formations, and kamma—life continues, and so does feeling.

Benefits of Seeing Cause and Effect


When we keep seeing the arising of feeling together with its causes, we eliminate the notion of non-existence. So long as the causes are still intact, we know the feeling will continue to arise. In the same way, by constantly seeing the cessation factors in the feeling, we eliminate the notion of existence—a permanent soul wandering through the cycle of rebirths. How can there be a permanent soul when the feeling and the causes keep perishing?

In the Kaccanagotta Sutta (SN 12.15), the Buddha said: **“This world, Kaccana, for the most part depends upon a duality—upon the notion of existence and the notion of non-**




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existence. But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of non-existence in regard to the world. And for one who sees the cessation of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of existence in regard to the world.”



Most people hold the wrong view of either existence or non-existence. By seeing the origination and cessation together with their causes as they really are with correct wisdom, these two wrong views are eliminated.



If we clearly comprehend the origination and cessation factors in feeling, we would not regard feeling as “myself,” “mine,” or “a being.” In this way, the elimination of the conventional truth of “self,” “people,” and “sentient beings” is achieved.



Seeing Impermanence

Having investigated the conditioned origination of feeling, we continue to be aware of every arising of feeling. With sustained mindfulness, we soon see the cessation of that same feeling again and again. In other words, sustained mindfulness prepares the mind for wisdom to arise.

The Buddha gave a simile: Just as a farmer has first to plough the ground in order to be able to sow, so too mindfulness fulfils an important preparatory role for the arising of wisdom.

It is wisdom that penetrates into the impermanence of feelings.

Understanding the impermanence of feelings is important so that the mind will not be deceived by the perception of permanence. This happens because



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sometimes a pleasant feeling can be so enticing that it makes the mind forgetful.

I still remember one of my experiences in which my mindfulness of impermanence became muddled.

One day during meal time, a delicious bite of food touched my tongue. It was so soothing and a strong pleasant feeling arose. Because of that pleasant feeling, the mind immediately clung to it with craving, and longed for the same pleasant feeling to repeat itself. Fettered by craving, the mind lost its composure and clarity, resulting in restlessness, agitation, and delusion. The mind delusively thought that pleasant feeling was permanent, and further grasped the pleasant feeling as "my self"—as if it could exercise the power of control and make that same pleasant feeling re-arise.

To satiate the craving, I stretched my hand out to have a second mouthful of the food. When the food touched the tongue again, I could see my mind—instead of being aware of the present arising of a new

feeling, it longed for the previous pleasant feeling to re-occur, not knowing that the previous pleasant feeling had already gone. Not getting the same pleasant feeling it longed for, the mind became agitated, a kind of unpleasant feeling. As said by Arahant Dhammadinna: "*Pleasant feeling is pleasant when it persists, and painful when it changes.*" (MN 44)

The Buddha said that *feelings are like bubbles—having formed, they immediately vanish. They change from moment to moment, never the same for two consecutive moments. Anicca, impermanence, is simply their nature. So, how could the same pleasant feeling be repeatable?*

In this case, I felt that my mind had been cheated by the perverted perception of permanence in regard to feeling.



In order not to forget the impermanence of all feelings, we further contemplate feeling as "*impermanent... perishable... perishable... unenduring... unenduring...*" Without contemplating in this way, the rise



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and fall of feeling will not become clear, as it is concealed by the compactness of continuity. That continuity gives rise to the perverted perception of permanence.

Sometimes we also contemplate feeling *as an affliction... an affliction* (because it restricts freedom of the mind)...as *Mara's bait... Mara's bait* (because it is the bait of Mara's defilements—craving and aversion)... *as void... void...* (because it is devoid of a state of being, an owner, abider, doer, experiencer).



Contemplating in such a way is not only in accordance with the truth, but very effective in blocking the pleasant feeling from developing into craving—the origin of the truth of suffering, the second noble truth.

When insight knowledge is not fully mature, we are unable to experience the rapid origination and cessation of feeling.



However, if we continue to contemplate feeling as it is, as mindfulness becomes stronger and wisdom becomes sharper, we will directly see or experience the rapid origination and cessation of feeling, regardless of whether it is pleasant or unpleasant.

I still recall one of my experiences while I was in Sri Lanka many years ago.

I flew to Sri Lanka simply because I wanted to support my teacher with the proper food conducive for his health and practice. It was very challenging living there due to my own poor health as well as the poor living conditions there at that time.

After a few months, I felt very exhausted and my body could not cope with the harsh conditions any further. I felt very fatigued. Both my mind and body were afflicted. Leaving the place seemed the only way to bring my pain and misery to an end. But I stayed on simply because my teacher still needed my help.




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Since there was no other way to escape from this plight, I had no choice but to directly face this unpleasant feeling with mindfulness. With sustained mindfulness, I saw that the unpleasant feeling arose and ceased continuously with fast speed. Just as a man standing on the bank of a pond during heavy rain would see large bubbles appearing on the surface of the water and breaking up as soon as they appeared, so too I saw how feeling arose and ceased repeatedly. Toward the end, I did not see feeling any longer, but merely rapid, continuous arising and ceasing. Nothing else!

As the uninterrupted process of origination and cessation went on, the insight dawned on me that every arising is suffering. "Arising" is danger, terror, and oppression. The mind came to the conclusion that only "non-arising" or "non-origination" is safety, security, and relief.

At this point, there was "no one" involved in the whole process. Only suffering and cessation of suffering manifested alternately. Every arising appeared as suffering, and every cessation as bliss.



Whatever phenomenon arose eventually ceased. Where there is no origination, there is no cessation or death. The insight dawned that complete cessation is happiness, bliss, and security.

It is not without reason that the Buddha declared: **“Both formerly and now, I teach only suffering and cessation of suffering.”**



Seeing suffering and non-self



The nature of rapid origination and cessation is stressful because, as it is said, *“What is impermanent is stressful.”* Why? Because of the continuous oppression of rising and falling.



When one sees impermanence and suffering in feelings, one further understands the non-self nature of feelings. Because it is also said, *“What is stressful is not self.”* Impermanence, suffering, and non-self are



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different faces of the same thing. When a practitioner sees one, he understands the other two.

In the discourse “The Characteristic of Non-self” (SN 22.59), the Buddha said, **“Whatever feelings, whether past, present, or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, far or near, superior or inferior, are impermanent. What is impermanent, subject to change, and suffering cannot be regarded as ‘mine,’ ‘I,’ or ‘myself.’”**



Why? Because there is no way to exercise power over them. Insusceptibility to the exercise of power is one of the characteristics of non-self. So one can further contemplate the non-self nature of feelings.





6



Feeling as non-self






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“Or his mindfulness is established as ‘there is feeling.’ And that mindfulness is established to the extent necessary for further knowledge and mindfulness.”




Thus, the practitioner repeatedly keeps his mindfulness well-established on the feeling until further mindfulness and knowledge arise to know: there is feeling only, but *no experiencer*.


A detached attitude while contemplating feeling helps us to realize “*feeling exists, but there is no experiencer.*” Regardless of whatever feelings arise, observe them calmly



with detachment, or with a passionless mind similar to a physician observing the pain of his patient. He does not get entangled in the pain of the patient. The way is to de-personalize the feeling by noting it repeatedly with a mind devoid of grasping—“feeling is not myself,” “feeling is mere phenomena.” In other words, when feeling arises, repeatedly be aware that it is “simply feeling.”



Regard all feelings that arise as momentary phenomena that come and go, devoid of a controlling power of “self.” When pleasant feeling arises, know it without clinging; when it goes, let it go without moaning.



If we continue to practice in this way over and over again, our mindfulness and knowledge will then be strengthened and we will see that there is feeling only.



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Not delighting in feelings

The Buddha once asked Venerable Sariputta: “Sariputta, why do you not delight in feeling?”

Venerable Sariputta replied: “Because of its impermanence.”

What is impermanent is dukkha. If we delight in the constant change of feelings, we delight in dukkha.

There could be another answer to the question posed by the Buddha: Because feeling, especially a pleasant one, leads to bondage, longing, desire, craving and clinging (if one is not mindful). And when desire and craving are not fulfilled, one ends up with suffering. However, seeing its suffering, one does not delight in pleasant feeling.



Venerable Sariputta himself was liberated when he reflected on the discourse connected with feeling. At that time the Buddha preached to Dighanakha: (MN 74):


“Pleasant feeling, Aggivessana, is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, vanishing, fading away, and ceasing. Unpleasant feeling too is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, vanishing, fading away, and ceasing. Neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling too is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, vanishing, fading away, and ceasing.

“Seeing thus, a well-taught noble disciple becomes disenchanted with pleasant feeling, disenchanted with unpleasant feeling, disenchanted




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with neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling. Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, his mind is liberated. When it is liberated, there comes the knowledge: 'It is liberated.' He understands: 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.'”




On that occasion, Venerable Sariputta was standing behind the Blessed One, fanning him. He reflected on what Buddha had taught, and through not clinging, his mind was liberated from the taints.




Summary


Having understood the contemplation of feelings as instructed by the Buddha, we may want to ask ourselves a question. How and when to begin this practice?



One can begin the practice in one's daily life as well as in a formal meditation setting. In one's daily life, apart from falling sleep, one's senses are constantly open to the contact of sense objects. Every contact conditions one type of feeling. This means feelings are there all the time for one to contemplate.



Or in formal meditation, one can begin with mindfulness of breathing first until some degree of concentration is developed. This is to prepare or sharpen the mind to see things more clearly. After that, one can shift one's attention to the different sensations that arise in the body. With mindfulness, one begins to be aware of the arising of physical feelings as they actually are, regardless of whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.





One can also shift the attention to one's mental reactions toward the physical




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pleasant or unpleasant feeling. If there is unpleasant mental feeling toward the pain, be aware of it; see unpleasant mental feeling as unpleasant mental feeling, etc.





In summary, one first arouses one's mindfulness by being aware of feelings whenever they arise. Without mindfulness, pleasant feeling will condition craving, and unpleasant feeling will condition hatred. Mindfulness is like the protector of the mind—it protects the mind from reacting compulsively. 

Later, one contemplates the origination and cessation factors in feelings together with their causes. Seeing the cause and effect relationship of feelings helps one to realize the non-self nature of feelings. One further contemplates feelings as impermanent, until their fast arising and ceasing are revealed. Being oppressed by arising and ceasing, one feels the unsatisfactory nature of feelings.



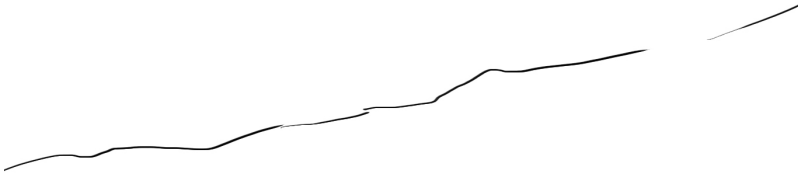
When one sees all feelings in this way, one becomes dispassionate towards all feelings. *One's mind turns away from feelings, one does not delight in them.* One lets go of the attachment to them. Without attachment, one's mind arrives at peace.

The Dhammapada states: *“All conditioned things are impermanent and suffering—when one sees this with wisdom, one is disenchanted with it. This is the path to purification.”* (Dhp 277)



“Thus, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu dwells contemplating feelings in feelings.”

Not depending on anything by way of
craving and wrong view, he dwells. Nor
does he cling to anything in the world.





SHARING OF MERITS

Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti
sabbarasaṃ dhammaraso jināti;
Sabbaratiṃ dhammarati jināti,
taṇhakkhayaṃ sabbadukkhaṃ jināti.
(Dhp. 354)

A gift of Dhamma conquers all gifts;
the taste of Dhamma conquers all tastes;
a delight in Dhamma conquers all delights;
the ending of craving conquers all suffering &
stress.
(Dhp.354)

Ciraṃ Tiṭṭhatu Saddhammo!
Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

May the True Dhamma Endure for A Long Time!



*May all beings share this merit and
attain eternal happiness*

— Nibbāna

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